CHAPTER FIVE

Role of Sangha: Monks and Nuns
Till the Chinese took complete control of Tibet in the summer of 1959 and with the exile of Dalai Lama, the Buddhism of Tibet, popularly known as Lamaism, was already forced to reckon with the politics of Central Asia. All the Mongols looked to Lhasa with reverence, as it was the most sacred seat of the Dalai Lama, the spiritual and temporal head of Tibet. China's policy towards Tibet, therefore, always took account of the influence of Tibet's high Lamas over the peoples of Central Asia, especially the Mongols. So did its policy towards the border states in the Himalayas, such as Ladakh, Sikkim, Bhutan and Nepal. The development of Buddhism in Tibet had earned Tibet the religious leadership not only of the people of Tibetan origin but also of those in Mongolia and China as well. Thus religious relationship existed between Tibet and China, Tibet and Mongolia and Tibet and Himalayan states like Bhutan and Sikkim. Although, the arrival of British and Russia on the political scene of Central Asia created the relation complicated the Buddhism provided legitimacy to political and social authority in Tibet and served as value system, cultural bond, philosophy of life and framework for a complex political and social order till 1959.

This study deals here with the structure of socio-political life of Tibetan monks, bounded with the land system. It seeks to appraise the role of the monks and their organization in Tibetan freedom struggle.

Tibet, the "land of religion," always had its polity, governed by its own institutions and officials. Tibetan Polity, the form and process of civil government in Tibet, is often termed as "ch’ö-si nyi-dan" (chos-srid gnyis-ladan), which means "religion and politics." In the expression "B’ ö-zhung ch’ ö-si nyi-dan", "B’ ö-

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zhung” (Bod-gzhung) means “Government of Tibet.” “Ch’ō” (chos) generally has several meanings. In this context it means the “ch’ ō” of “ch’ ō k ön-ch’og” (chos dkon-mchog), the “Dharma.” The Tibetans have known this definition of it since the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet in the seventh century. “Si” (srid) means “politics,” the art of government, the art of directing or guiding the policy of government towards a particular goal. Sometimes it is expressed with another syllable, “ch’ab” (chab), to form “ch’ab-si” (chab-srid), without changing its original meaning. When it is combined with the syllable “pa” (pa), forming “si-pa,” it means the “universe” or “world,” depending upon the context. In the case of “ch’ ō-si,” however, it is to be understood as undertakings for the materialistic world, while the first syllable is to be understood as undertakings for the spiritual world. Thus “ch’ō” refers to religious sanctity and “si” to political authority. 2

“Nyi” (gnyis) is the number two and “dān” (Idan) is the possessive suffix. Thus “B’ō-zhung ch’ō-si nyi-dān” means the “Tibetan Government of Religion and Politics.”

This intermingling of religion and politics is not peculiar to Tibet alone. Elsewhere also, politics was mixed with a great deal of mythology and superstition. The two were so closely interwoven that no attempt was made to establish an independent science of politics until the Greeks developed political science in its pure and systematic form.

The divine origin or theocratic conception of rule is also another form of political authority sanctioned or sanctified by religion. It is a well-authenticated fact

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that the earliest forms of political authority were connected with unseen powers. Early rulers were often a combination of priest and king or shaman and king. The Tibetans as well, who found and enthroned Nya-tr'i tzän-po (gNyā-'khri btsan-po) as their first king in 127 B.C., believed in his “holiness,” in his “divinity.”

The early Tibetan kings from Song-tzän gam-po (Srong-blsan sgampo) (629-710 A.D) onwards were called “ch’ö- gyäl” (chos-rgyal; dharmarāja). Whatever may be the case, the fact remains that Buddhism permeated the life and thought of the Tibetans and with this innovation the expression “ch’ö-gyäl” came to penetrate the Tibetan ethos. “Ch’ö” sanctified the “gyäl-po” (rgyal-po), the king, as a political authority. Thus the title “ch’ö-gyäl” referred to two facts: (1) “ch’ö” as the established religion and (2) “gyäl-po as the established authority. This authority was by its nature political. Hence the duty and functioning of the king was religio-political. This fact was especially true of the Tibetan government between 1242 and 1950 when ecclesiastics ran it from the reign of Sakya Pandita Kün-ga gyäl-tsän (Sa-skya Pan-di-ta-Kun-dga’ rgyal-mtshan) (1182-1251) to that of the present Fourteenth Dalai Lama (b.1935). All along, the Government of Tibet maintained its dual character of religion and politics.

The term “ch’ö-si ngyi-dan” appeared for the first time in the seventeenth century when the Fifth Dalai Lama reorganised the Government of Tibet as “B’ö-zhung ga-dän p’o-dr’ang ch’og-lä nam-gyäl” (Bod-gshung dga’-ldan pho-brang phyogs-las rnam-rg yal), the “Ever Victorious Tibetan Government of Ga-dän p’o-dr’ang.” Although the term “ch’ö-gyäl,” embodying the same dual concept of

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3 Ibid. p. 79

4 Ibid. p. 127
religion and politics as before, suggests its origin from the Sanskrit term “dharmarāja,” there is little evidence to show that the Tibetan rulers sought to model their system on the practices of ancient India. Rather the Tibetan rulers, admirers of Dharmarāja Asoka, were merely indulging in their propensity towards giving native institutions Indian sanctity, only to enhance the dignity and prestige of their rule. They were constant attempts to identify their basic principles of government in accordance with the Buddhist concept of law. Hence, Tibet’s rule was based on two different sets of laws, the ten principles of Buddhism and the sixteen civil laws of Tibet. This dual character of the laws of the Tibetan government came into existence during King Song-tzān gam-po’s (Songsten Gampo’s) reign in the seventh century.

Its own institutions and officials have always governed Tibet. No account of it would be complete without referring the role of Sangha and monks in Tibetan society, its application to the people, and the impact it produces upon their life. The ecclesiastical aspect of Lamaism is necessary for a full understanding of the real position, which Buddhism occupies in Tibet today.

As a matter of fact, the time when Buddhism became an established religion in Tibet can be ascertained with some certainty. The Tibetan King, Songsten Gampo, must have been a man of considerable far sight. It is least likely that his two Chinese and Nepalese wives influenced him to adopt Buddhism as the religion of

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the country. The truth is that he recognised the enormous value that would attach to the identification of Buddhism with his new capital in 8th century.

The sacrosanct character of the country has saved the inhabitants again and again from hostile attacks; and this combined with the necessity of keeping serf people in unarmed condition, has made Tibetans a quiet race unused to war.

Lhasa has been a capital of Tibet, since 8th century king Songsten Gampo moved his government from the Yarlung river area to Lhasa. He himself selected Lhasa for the practice of his faith. The great three monasteries of Drepung, Sera and Ganden were built up later in the vicinity of Lhasa. They are known as “three pillars of the state” and consist of 20,000 monks. The Drepung is the largest monastery in the world where 7700-10,000 lives. The Drepung literally means the ‘pile of rice.’ Legend says that a poor herdsman’s son founded this monastery in 15th century. Drepung is divided into four colleges, each presided by its own abbot. Sera is the second largest monastery, with 5500 monks. While other monasteries have reputation for being pro-Chinese and against the Lhasa government, the Sera has a patriotic record. The word Sera probably means ‘hails’ and is said that the hails of Sera scattered the rice of Drepung, a comparison indicating the abilities of these two institutions. Another school of thought holds that Sera means “wild rose fence,” and claims that the site was surrounded by rose bushes when the monastery was founded in 1419. The peculiar character of Sera monastery is its maintenance of large bands of fighting monks.

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8 Ibid. p. 44.
Ganden, the third "pillar of the state," houses 33,000 lamas. This monastery is famous for the tomb of the Tsong-kapa, whose body is embalmed there. It is also considered chief seat of learning in a country where wisdom is considered the highest attainment of man, and where the human mind is credited with such powers as controlling the weather and daily life and death.

Sources showed that there were 95,528 monks in Central Tibet and Kham in 1641, and this enlarged into 319,270 monks in 1733. Assuming a population of about 2.5 million in 1733, it can be guessed that about 13 per cent of males were monks. The magnitude of this can be compared with Thailand, another prominent Buddhist society, where only about 1-2 percent of total males were monks.\(^\text{10}\) The Tibetans believed that monks *per se* are superior to laymen and that the state should foster both religion and the spiritual development of a country by making monkhood available to the largest possible numbers. Monasticism in Tibet, therefore, was not otherworldly domain of a minute elite but a mass phenomenon, as observed by Melvyn Goldstein.

Thus, more than one sixth of the male population of Tibet are monks. As boys destined for the priesthood, they live in monastery, generally when they were seven-eight years old. The *gendun* is generic term for all people who entered Buddhist monastic life. The *gendun* means "in search for virtue," and it described those who devote themselves to the noble service, such as service to mankind. A considerable number of monks, varying from perhaps 10 per cent to 50 per cent, are non-residents, as they would visit their base monasteries only for major festivities or for periods of renewing studies. For the rest of the years, they lived in community

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and carried out their religious activities and educational or social role. Some monks stayed with wealthy families, temples or shrines, these monks were called Konnyer (stewards of three jewels). A specific monk called chöney regularly visited less wealthy families, which could not offer permanent residence to monks.\textsuperscript{11} For Tibetans, this particular service performed by the monks is an essential part of their life. Laymen and monks had a patron and priest relation. The monks played the role of giving spiritual guidance and psychological healing and gave blessing and guidance of special importance. They performed service for the sick and dying such as performing Phawo, which marked the transference of a stream of consciousness of dead to a higher level or an enlightened realm.\textsuperscript{12}

However, the advice and blessing given by monks or Lamas were not based merely on an intellectual process or educational understanding but on a spiritual guidance gained through meditation and divination in the minds of devout. They are called the custodians of oracle, managers of monetary and public affairs. They are known for medical expertise and officially appointed to supervise the economy of the country.

The origin of the appointment of monks as officials appears to date back to the founding of Gelugpa government, when the 5\textsuperscript{th} Dalai Lama created sixteen positions to be filled by monks. As the government activities expanded over the years, particularly in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the government chose to enlarge the number of monk officials rather than creating more aristocrats. So, at the time of demise of the traditional Tibetan state, there were several hundreds of monks as officials who

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid. p. 134.
controlled religious and monastic affairs and played important roles in the administration of secular affairs.\textsuperscript{13} It is noted that, most commonly the monk officials were either the sons of the Lhasa middle class families or members of the families of existing monk officials. Sometimes, aristocratic families voluntarily enrolled a second son in that service. Furthermore, since monk officials were celibates, those households were perpetuated not by procreation but by adoption, usually of close relatives such as brothers' or sisters' sons, but not uncommonly an unrelated boy. Another method of recruitment, known as \textit{Traja}, involved the conscription of special levies to bring young monks from the monasteries. However, during 1913-1951, the \textit{Traja} mechanism was completely monopolized by middle classes whose family members had enrolled as monks especially to qualify for the \textit{Traja}.\textsuperscript{14}

According to Tibetan saying, the role of the monk is threefold. The first task is to set the wheel of knowledge in motion; the second is to set in motion the wheel of meditation; and third is to set the motion of the wheel of human action.\textsuperscript{15}

When one compares the Tibetan wheel of meditation with Roman Catholic High Mass, the rituals and chanting resembles. Many points of similarity are found such as enforced celibacy, use of the rosary, swinging censers for scattering incense, and repetition of prayers.\textsuperscript{16} But again, they are superficial resemblances. In character as well as dogma, the two religions are fundamentally different. The Catholics are bound by strict rules and regulation, while Tibetan monk, as long as he attends the

\textsuperscript{13} Melvyn C. Goldstein, 1989, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid. p. 9.
service in the monastery temple and is subject to lay discipline of the proctors, he
can pursue any spiritual goal and can endeavour to reach it by whatever means he
chooses. He may teach and believe in whatever doctrine that appeals to him. And if
he can afford it he can keep his own establishment within the monastery. Another
essential difference between Lamaism from Catholics is tolerance, which is
remarkable. Every Tibetan monk (Kargyu and Nyinma) is supposed to spend three
years, three months and three days in solitary meditation.17 The Tibetans have
genius for credulity; they believed implicitly in various psychic phenomena such as
that of generating internal heat (tumo), which enables the ill-clad and under-
nourished hermit to endure the bitter Tibetan winter at 15,000 feet above the sea
level.

Another strong resemblance is to Hinduism, as the doctrine of Karma,
transmigration of souls, renunciation of the worldly things, and absorption into the
universal soul are more or less common in its metaphysics. There are also
similarities in mythology, worship and ceremonies.18 Lamaism, from the early days
of the 8th century when Padma Sambhava preached the Tantric doctrine, has
gradually replaced the sutra teaching of Buddha apparently. And the belief of the
earlier pon religion was further removed from pure Buddhism. The most sacred
symbol of the ponbos is the gammadion cross, the Swastika of the Hindus. This
emblem is a remnant of fire and sun worship: it represents the solar wheel and the
two sticks (arani of Hindus) when rubbed together produce the sacred fire. The
presence of this symbol in the name of Yungdung, the mythical founder of the
ponbo religion, shows the predominant importance of fire worship in the premature

17 Spencer Champman, Lhasa, the Holy City (London: Reader Union Ltd. 1940), p. 213.
religion. The Buddhist Tibetans also possess a similar emblem, except that the brackets are turned in the opposite direction; they however, ascribe a less value to it than do the ponbos. Their religion, which is a coarse naturalism combined with worship of ancestors, is the same as that practised among from time immemorial among the Turkomans, the Mongols and the Chinese, and that is why it greatly resembles Taoism, which is no other than primitive religion of China, covered with a varnish of Buddhist metaphysics.\textsuperscript{19}

The religion of Tibet consists in its essence of a concatenation of superstitious practices and the constant veneration shown to the Lamas, to whom it would be a nameless crime to do even the least injury. A theft committed on Lama entails a ten time greater penalty than one committed on a layman; to murder a layman is three or four times as cheap as murder a monk. This has not kept Tibetans from criticising their greed of gain and their tyranny, to scoff at their hypocrisy and to tell sprightly stories about them.\textsuperscript{20}

The monastic order, of which the Dalai Lama is head, may be compared with Hildebrand (Pope Gregory VII, 1073-85).\textsuperscript{21} Like himself, a reformer of a monastic orders that had lapsed into laxity and forgetfulness of their good rules, the Gelugpa or yellow hat sect of the Dalai Lama was a group of reformists dedicated to cleaning up abuses in the Tibetan monastic system. Emphasising celibacy and scholasticism as pre-requisites to more advanced tantric studies and practices, they had deep commitment to fundamentals of “pure” Buddhism. This placed them in conflict with the older and then dominant Red Hat sects, which advocated “instantaneous”

\begin{footnotes}
\item[19] Ibid. p. 325.
\item[20] Ibid. p. 336.
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practices to attain enlightenment and were less concerned with celibacy and study. The Gelugpa, in turn, viewed these Red Hat practices as corruption and debasement.22

Drepung, Sera and Ganden Monasteries are the 'three pillars of the state.' The monks belong to monastery through their membership in a college, a standing committee functions at the monastery level, and there is abbot only for the individual colleges not for the whole monastery. Each Tratsang or college has its own administration and resources and in turn is comprised of important residential subunits known as Khamtsen, which contains the actual cells of the monks. Like the college, they had their own administration.23 The mystique of Tibet gives its special place in the course of great cultural traditions. Tibetan Buddhism created a state that was sui generis in its system as well as its goals, and that state must be analytically explored not only for its own sake but also for the sake of a comparative grasp of the broader intellectual problems in our part of moving world.24

The Sign and Symbol Technique of Protest for Solution

The world takes time to absorb great ideas and wait for the events to happen. While others wait, a sensitive conscience foresees; the latter was true in the case of monks who mobilized the pro-independence movement in Tibet 1987. They envisaged the total independence within the Buddhist framework, which has a wider coherent view. They believed in re-incarnation and, for them, the spiritual freedom is the highest concern to maintain dharma. Thus, independence or freedom implies

23 Ibid. p. 27.
freedom to protect dharma. But the freedom in turn is senseless without acknowledging the human condition. What in a modern western political context are essentially secular political values (human rights and political freedom) are, for the Tibetans, identified with the sacred and symbolically opposed to the Chinese communist system in Tibet, which is considered profane. In 1987, the monks propagated the idea of sign and symbol as a non-violence instrument to protest against the Chinese hegemony. This idea was woven into a dynamic revolutionary complex of action and thought.

It seems absurd to suggest that Tibetan monks were less aware of the violence in 1978. The twentieth century has witnessed 250 wars and over 100 million causalities. Over 23 million people have died in more than 160 wars since 1945, and these wars were overwhelmingly fought in the Third world. At the same time, the monks changed the dimensions of violent protest and resorted to symbolic gesture as a national protest, as humanitarians disturbed by violence. One of the tasks of the monk is to prove the "wheel of human action." To monks, if an action is justified, one must immediately start carrying it out without waiting for what is considered to be opportune in the tactical sense. The idea can be better expressed only in action. The Jokhang temple in the centre of Lhasa has become the symbolic focus of political protest precisely because it exemplifies the collective memory, linking Tibetan identity to its past. Likewise, the legends of Songsten Gampo, the ancient king, reinforced a collective political identity and sustained a sense of political agency in the face of Chinese political domination.

Ronald D. Schwartz, Circle of Protest: Political Rituals in the Tibetan Uprising (New York: Colombia University, 1994), 73.


Ronald D. Schwartz, 1994, p. 221.
When Tibet experienced the communist onslaught, the monks perceived whether the time has come to unleash to 'prove the wheel of actions.' The kind of action in this connection, in a certain sense, is characteristic of it. The purpose of the protest movement was to eschew the violence against the Chinese and to embarrass them with the peaceful demonstrations in capital of Tibet (Lhasa). According to China Agency News reports, the Tibetan monks demonstrated in the streets of Lhasa to protest against Chinese rule of the region. In an unusual display of anti-Chinese sentiments, the Tibetan monks seeking independence demonstrated in Lhasa and clashed with police. The Tibetans have suffered and passed through the PLA, Seventeen-point agreement, population transfer, Cultural Revolution and so on. The PLA and the seventeen-point agreement altered the traditional value system through promulgation of military and political power establishment in Tibet. Apparently, the reason why monks resorted to protest movement was to re-establish their traditional value system, which has undergone seas of change under the Chinese authority. What is essentially here was perhaps that the monks wanted to strengthen the autonomy, dignity and integrity of the Dalai Lama's authority. This is first of all the question of pure power relations, which aims at rebuilding their identity by strengthening it at the bottom (traditional) so that it would weaken at the top (Chinese power), and then there would be the question of ingenuity of alien rule. In the other words, one could not have afforded to wait or ignore, but must spread the protest movement at once.

In the protest movement in all, the prominent action and thoughts of monks cannot be denied, as they are most organized and educated section of the Tibetan society. Therefore, they led the protest movement, blended with political and religious elements. On 27 September 1987, a group of twenty-one monks from Drepung monastery had drawn a crude version of the banned Tibetan national flag and taken on oath before the statue of the protector-goddess Palden Lhamo, the patron deity of Tibet. The monks shouted slogans calling for the restoration of Tibet's independence for which the Chinese National Commissioner stated that any attempt “to break Tibet away from motherland and sabotage unity” among the various Chinese nationalities including Tibet would never succeed. According to the Guardian (London), the Chinese faced its worst political crisis.

The ideas of monks taking initiatives in the pro-independence movement are their inherent instincts of responsibility. The fundamental idea that enters the picture is remarkable: one should be aggressive not against the another human being, but against the Modus Operandi. During the pro-independence protest movement the monks used the instrument of sign and symbolic rituals alone. For instance, the use of Khorra was visible; this ritual is universal practice around the temples and holy sites. Khorra literally draws the largest possible crowd as a people and community. It offers a religious practice without status, distinctions and thus the opportunity to recognise common features shared with other Tibetans from every background and every part of Tibet. In other words, Khorra effectively distinguishes Tibetan from Chinese who do not practise Khorra and remained visibly foreign. Through the

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33 Ronald D. Schwartz, 1994, p. 27.
instrument of rituals, the monks and nuns are in aggression against the antagonism
and not against the antagonist, and they increase the dependency on sign and
symbolic gesture to provide the Tibetans with new and powerful way to understand
the entire protest. Within the action sanctioned by religion, accomplishing religious
ends, and benefiting both the individual and community, Khorra rituals enable the
Tibetans to cross the threshold separating private religious practice from public
political protest against Chinese rule.

Evidently, Ganden monks in Monlam festival in 1988 have demonstrated the
principle of aggression against the antagonism and not antagonist. Monlam is a
Tibetan religious festival, which rededicates Tibetans every year to the supremacy
of Buddhism. During this time the locus of power shifts from Potala to the Jokhang.
The Tibet state, by publicly submitting to monastic authority, reaffirmed its raison
d'être in the form that its secular authority is ultimately a dispensation of the
monastic hierarchy. Monlam periodically acknowledges thus the relationship
between the state and religion. However, it is difficult to determine whether the
Chinese authority were conscious of this relation. But apparently, by claiming the
sponsorship for 1988 Monlam festival, they were attempting to shift the ceremonial
locus of Chinese power from the Norbulinka, to which they have already claim as
secular celebration of Tibetan "Minority" culture, to Jokhang, the symbolic centre of
the Tibetan nation. The party officials who assembled on the platform on 5 March
1988 might have imagined that they could take the place of the former Tibetan
government as legitimate patrons of religion. They might have also thought that, by
sponsoring Monlam during the previous two years, the party had successfully

\[34\] Ibid. p. 88.
established itself in its new role, usurping the position of the Dalai Lama's government in the eyes of the Tibetan people.\(^{35}\)

However, the symbolic nature of Monlam is not so easily manipulated; it requires the compliance of the monastic establishment. The monks responded by refusing compliance and openly challenged the Chinese authority. Even when the monks were coerced to participate in the Monlam festival inside the temple, which trapped not only the monks but also the Chinese representatives for two hours, where the latter faced humiliation and at the end were rescued by military intervention, the symbolic victory belonged to monks.\(^{36}\)

The Monlam is the ritual expression of the formula that religion and politics are combined. The Chinese government attempted to assert itself into the ritual equation by assuming the role of patron of religion, but under the conditions of Chinese rule in Tibet - and the absence of the Dalai Lama - the rituals of the Monlam can only evoke the counter-image of independence. Tibetan monks did exactly what they might have been expected to do, seizing the occasion to deny legitimacy to the Chinese state.\(^{37}\)

There is a crucial difference between monastic protest in pre-1959 Tibet and the current protest. Protest under the Chinese rule is directed against political institutions that are perceived by Tibetans as alien and imposed by force. Thus, the current protest movement has an explicit nationalist context. Tibetan nationalism is very much a modern phenomenon; the thinking of young monks today has been

\(^{35}\) Ibid. p. 89.
\(^{36}\) Ibid. p. 89.
\(^{37}\) Ibid. p. 90.
politicised in a way that would not have been possible in pre-1959 Tibet. The articulation of Tibetan independence as a political ideology is a response to the conditions of Chinese communist rule in Tibet, which has attempted to validate the reorganization of Tibetan society along the Chinese lines through communist ideology. In this regard, the monks see themselves as acting for the general interests of society in specifically political sense, allied with the ordinary Tibetan against foreign invaders. They do see themselves as acting to protect special rights or privileges, as succinctly explained by Ronald Schwartz. Although in the pre-1959 movement, the religious orthodoxy were too hostile toward western ideas and influences, today the western political ideas of democracy and human rights are perceived compatible with Tibetan nationalism.

The modus operandi of the monks to rebel against antagonism is thus to fight against the suppression of human rights, exploitation and hegemony of the Chinese, and attempt to strengthen the traditional system, which they called "Free Tibet" or independent Tibet."

Although the logic of the monks fighting against the antagonism and not antagonists appears confusing, it reflects the whole paradigm when one equates human beings with the operating system. The Buddhists believed that all human beings are same, who seek happiness and try to avoid sufferings. Indeed, all sentiment beings have the natural right to pursue happiness and peace. On the other hand, no one has right to inflict pain and suffering on others. Thus, the monks distinguish between the antagonist and antagonism by applying the tenets of Buddhism. The respect for other being not only does indicate the non-elimination of

opponent, but also manifestation of granting an equal status to it. For instance, the Dalai Lama’s strong wish to understand his opponent and approach the middle path, where an opponent is not just considered an opponent but understood in equal terms. And, the Dalai Lama’s strong opinion against violence is another related instance. However, some Tibetans blame the Dalai Lama for being too passive and mild by asserting that other refugees like Palestinians or Afghans follow violence and earn more sympathy and world support for the cause. The Dalai Lama maintained, “violence is not ultimatum, people might be attracted to something more because of violence, but as a basic human being one will not admire violence deep down. People do not like the situation where people are killed, beaten and tortured. The basic human instinct will disagree with violence. Therefore, it is important to pay more attention to those activities, which are non-violent. They involve reason, respect for human life, human compassion and human understanding.” In Tibetan case, violence would be suicidal, and the Dalai Lama suggests demonstration without violence.39

Tibetan monks are not the only ones who value non-violence. The Buddha Shakyamuni and Mahavir, the Jain taught it and, in 20th century, Mahatma Gandhi implemented the noble idea in politics. Apparently, the non-violence method is difficult to put into practice in the cutthroat world and reaching to win the opponent’s point of view is beyond the one’s boundary. However, the Dalai Lama asserts that the non-violent methods takes time, more patience and determination, and the achievement may be small but "it is real" and genuine. Non-violence is something like an experiment on this planet. If succeeds, it gains new meaning and

39 Ibid. p. 250.
can be applied to other problems of the world, and the Tibetans should realise this special kind of responsibility.  

**Battle of Ideology in the Current Pro-independence Movement**

After pro-independence demonstrations (1987), new forms of protest emerged through the ideology at the centre (holy site) of Lhasa. It offered Tibetans model for the expression of resistance to Chinese hegemony. The battle of ideology forces not only to imbibe the idea to oppose the Chinese hegemony, but it also imbues to represent means of articulating national identity vertically and horizontally. And this remained a constant source of challenge to Chinese administration and, in a way, has been able to continue a process of national building and development in the face of overwhelming Chinese authority.

Despite the experience of Cultural Revolution, which abrogated religion and culture, the visibility of monks in the demonstrations in holy site of Jokhang temple indicates their unremitting loyalty to their religion and culture and the Dalai Lama, who represents not only the pre-1950 Lhasa, but also the remembered political history stretching back to the time of ancient king.  

In the two years following 1987 there were at least two-dozen demonstrations staged by monks and nuns in Lhasa. They not only evoked with the idea of the past glories but also incorporated the political literature and Buddhist value system to revolt against the Chinese state.

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40 Ibid. p. 253.
41 Ronald D Schwartz, 1994, p. 221.
The battle of ideology has taken a different path, selecting Buddhist values and practices that sustain a symbolic dialogue with the 'other,' however one sided it may be. The protesters drawing their strength from religious passion, remained morally and politically "rational," committed to unrealistic values and approached the human rights and democracy. Regardless of high cost of protesters, since the protest under repression demanded a constant supply of heroes and martyrs, here again the Buddhist values of meritorious action and self-sacrifice epitomized in the monastic vocation to provide the inspiration.42

The method of Korwa (Skorwa, circumambulation), adopted by monks during the protest movement was one another Buddhist meritorious action. The exercise of Korwa is nation building, since it highlighted the separation of boundary of Chinese from the Tibetan world. The monks assembled in the vicinity of Barkhor in the old Tibetan holy site of Lhasa, and proceeded to circumambulate the Jokhang temple while chanting, "Tibet is independent and long live the Dalai Lama." This ritual became significant, because it has drawn out the line, which indicates symbolically their territory.

As far as ordinary Tibetans are concerned, the Korwa is simplest and most visible form of religious expression, with prostrations, turning prayer wheels and burning incense. It conforms to the understanding of religion, which is incorporated into the party policy by allowing the expression of voluntary religious faith. Religion, in the Chinese tactics, thus allows harmless superstitions, at best of derogative feature, of minority nationalities. Forcing it into this mould neutralizes the explosive potential of religion to unite Tibetans as a nation. In the long run,

42 Ibid. p. 228.
modernisation and economic development are expected to make religious practices vestigial, and modernization and economic development cannot function as effective ideological substitute for socialism that has come to signify little besides party domination. The Chinese have anticipated that Tibetan thinking can be modernised along the Chinese lines. Instead, the Chinese claims of modernity and progress have sharpened the Tibetan sense of nationhood. Tibetans brush off the Chinese assertion that protesters wanted to bring back feudalism and "serf system." The Tibetans perceive the current economic gains as the natural result of the temporary lifting of an alien and oppressive system, not as the effect of positive constructive policy.

The monks insist that whatever benefits they have obtained resulted from their own efforts rather than from Chinese intervention. Also, the willingness of the Chinese government to admit to the mistakes and ill effects of the Cultural Revolution do not strengthen the Chinese stand. The Chinese domination of Tibet and continuing political repression originate from the same system. Tibetans would thus carry through the process of dismantling communist rule in Tibet to completion.43

Tibetans perceive the benefits of economic progress as being very unevenly distributed, as the large share goes to the continuing influx of Chinese population, who have seized opportunities, where as the Tibetan disadvantage increased rather than diminished. Ganden monks added that the Chinese claims to invest much in Tibet for the benefits of Tibet, in practice, have gone to the benefits of Chinese immigrants. Tibetans do not share the facilities that the Chinese counterparts in Tibet enjoy. The Chinese claim to have come to help Tibetans because Tibetans are

43. Ronald D. Schwartz, 1994, p. 121.
incapable of helping themselves and need help to develop. On the contrary, Tibetans are capable in every sense, as they have been taken care of themselves for thousands of years without any external help.

From 1987 onwards, the monks portray the struggle not just as a war fought for nation but as, representing that of the whole society encompassed with the ideas of outside world such as democracy and human rights in the national struggle.

One of the monks stated that the notion of human right is “truth” (bden pa), which carries both religious and political meanings. The Tibetans speak of the “truth” (as justice) of their cause, of their ‘truth right’ and of their ‘true history,’ all of which the Chinese have denied them, but are entitled to. Thus, the ideology of truth is presented as a weapon to fight the alien rule. The Drepung monks stated that “the best weapon to fight Chinese is based on truth, otherwise we cannot fight them back. Even if we have the power to fight them, we would not do that. Instead we will fight with truth.”

After the imposition of martial law in Tibet, the monks, as ardent believers and upholders of the ideology truth, appealed to United Nations to grant them the chance of revealing their true story. However, the Chinese themselves laid the foundation for the Tibetan political consciousness through their vicious campaign against the protesters. The Chinese deployed “work teams” in major monasteries and nunneries to re-educate the monks and nuns, and the function of monasteries was axiomatized by Chinese policy. With the re-education of clergy and imposition of specific restrictions on Tibetan religious practices, the Chinese put on risk their entire claim to reforms. The repressive policies with which they responded to the 1987 demonstrations are viewed by the Chinese rhetoric as indication of the collapse
of a commitment of liberalization, although they are claimed as done by western standards. In terms of legitimacy, the apparently minor restrictions on a popular religion that arose at the end of 1987 represented a more critical threat to the validity of the Chinese political rhetoric than what they did in the campaigns of arrest, torture and the summary execution of Tibetan dissidents over the previous years.44

The religions restrictions on burning of juniper incense and practice of traditional throwing of *tsampa* trapped again the Chinese authority into an agenda set by Tibetans. As, at the outset, military rule had made it almost impossible to stage political demonstration in direct ways, Tibetan religious traditions, which always tend to express nationalist feelings as well as spiritual ones, became more laden with political symbolism. This is a direct reflection of the whole problem faced by Chinese government, according to the Dalai Lama. It is the problem of diametrically different nature, the Tibetan synthesis of church and state believing in the Dalai Lama and supporting Tibetan Independence.45 The two issues are closely intermingled that Chinese authority finds it difficult or impossible to express relative tolerance for Tibetan religion without in some way tolerating or acknowledging the concept of the Tibetan state.

It is observed that Chinese troops had spent ten hours watching Tibetans throwing *tsampa* (national food stuff) over each other at Jokhang temple, openly and silently celebrating the award of the Nobel Peace Prize for the Dalai Lama, without knowing the significance of ritual. So when the Chinese authority realised the significance, it was presumably humiliating to them. Their knowledge of Tibetan

religious rituals was superficial and they were unaware of the special relation of tsampa to the person of the Dalai Lama. Subsequently, the authority issued a statement, declaring that throwing of Tsampa and incense burning as illegal and amounting to political crime.

It is noted that the Chinese authority appeared to get involved in a struggle over symbols in which they more constantly sought in the defensive. Although the Chinese authority has always laid a premium on the exhaustive writing of history, Chinese officials seemed unable to contain the historical resonance, which the Tibetan nationalists could evoke by their use of religion and nationalist anniversaries.46

Robert Barnett stated that the position of religious tolerance was progressively invalidated as the Chinese found it harder to separate the attack on nationalism from that on the politico-religious symbols used by the pro-independence movement. The claim of religious tolerance was further weakened in 1990s, when monks and nuns suspected of supporting the pro-independence movement were expelled from monasteries and nunneries, and at the same time all the major religious ceremonies were forbidden except by official approval and tightened bureaucratic controls.

The barricading by tanks of the Jokhang temple in 1990 symbolized an end of the commitment to liberalization that had begun exactly one decade before.

46 Ibid. p. 252.
Role of the Nuns in the Protest Movement

Ordained as "holders of the Dharma," nuns, like monks, have played a powerful role in the resistance movement, motivated by the religious life and by their commitment to the survival of the Tibetan people and culture.\footnote{Hanna Havnevik, in Robert Barnett and Shirin Akincé, (eds.), \textit{Resistance and Reform in Tibet} (London: Hurst and Co., 1994), p. 259.} In Buddhist tradition and traditional Tibet, male monasticism has been dominant, and so nuns have suffered marginalisation in several respects. Traditionally, nuns have been less educated, did not receive financial support from home; nunneries were usually sub-branches of important male monasteries, and monks or yogis were often abbots in nunneries. The resistance movement for the nuns has provided a way to make meaning of their lives by creating change at the national level as well as in the politics of the monastic orders. On the societal level, they are dedicated to saving their people and culture. On the local level, nuns are concerned with changing their status in monastic life so that monks are not the only authority. They want women to receive more education, financial support, and social prestige for joining a nunnery. They became "political nuns" and, through their actions and activities, provided a powerful model of a "change agent" for all women.\footnote{Benina Berger Gould, \textit{Frontline Feminism, Women, War and Resistance} (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 2000), p. 219.}

There are no records before 1959 of organized political activity by nuns within Tibetan society. But since 1959, they have played a "prominent role in resistance to the Chinese occupation" (Schwartz, 1994:99). In most of the
demonstrations that have taken place in the Tibet since the autumn of 1987, young nuns have been very active... About 50 percent have been arrested.”

“Through political protest, nuns are thus in a position to change Tibetans’ perceptions of their status and gain respect. Tibetans see nuns assuming the same burden of political responsibility as a concomitant of their clerical status as the monks” (Schwartz, 1994:102).

Russell and Singeri (1992:29) stated: “On March 12th 1959, the first major political action by organized body of Tibetan women took place in Lhasa to oppose the forced occupation of their country by the Chinese. This is known as the Tibetan Women’s Uprising” Two nuns were among the leaders of this women’s revolt in Lhasa. According to the Tibetan Women’s Association report of 1995, an estimated 3,000 women met publicly at the Drebu Lingka, the ground below the Potala Palace, and in a spontaneous movement of solidarity among lay women and nuns, the women of Lhasa staged several peaceful protests, demanding that the Chinese leave Tibet. On 19 March, at least 5,000 women gathered to make offerings and prayers and led a procession to the Indian Consul General to ask the he (counsel general) help to intercede for them against the encroaching Chinese army. One of the outstanding leaders of the Women’s Resistance Movement of March 1959 was Pamo Kunsang, a mother of six. She inspired many women with her courage and determination. In spite of being behind bars, she did not lose her convictions and became a legendary martyr for Tibetans.50

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50 Ibid. p. 220.
The second wave of organized political activity occurred during 1965-1977, during the Cultural Revolution, and the movement saw women as natural leaders. There was a mix of non-violent and guerrilla warfare. It was also the time of greatest religious oppression. Tibetan Women’s Association was less active during this time, but not as influenced in supporting non-violent actions. Trinley Choedon, executed in 1969, was believed to have led a guerrilla organization stretching from Mount Kailash to Kham. Pema Dechen, said to have led a rebellion of 30,000 guerrillas, was also publicly executed. Ama Adhe, Ani Pachen, and Rangzen Amala are among the nuns who bear witness to this period of struggle for Tibet’s independence.

The third period was during the 1980s and took a distinct shape in the form of only non-violent activities and demonstrations. Monks and nuns were the major initiators during this time, seeing that their position as women and men without families made them more able to bear the toll of political leadership. While nuns were the most active female dissidents in Tibet, laywomen also initiated protests and sheltered fugitives. The Tibetan Women’s Association was officially reactivated in 1984 in the exile community of Dharamsala, India.\(^51\)

Non-violence as a political policy, not unlike militarism, has also been primarily dictated by the philosophy and belief systems of men. Gandhi defined the resolution of conflict as “absence of conflict.”\(^52\) For Gandhi, the Bhagavad-Gita was the major scripture from which he built his non-violent theory of Satyagraha. “Gandhi did not see Satyagraha as a movement for independence nor a technique of

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\(^{51}\) Ibid. p. 221.

political action... Satyagraha is a spiritual force, a potent, viable source of energy that belongs to all individuals, though few are aware of it.\textsuperscript{53}

Peter Kelly from West Germany is another important voice in the development of a theory of power and non-violence. She states: "When we talk of non-violent opposition, we do not mean opposition to parliamentary democracy. We mean opposition from within parliamentary democracy. Non-violent opposition in no way diminishes or undermines representative democracy; in fact, it strengthens and stabilizes it. It is expressed in all kinds of local groups operating outside parliament, in work councils, and other self-governing bodies. Non-violent opposition is one way, among others, of forming political opinion within that infrastructure."\textsuperscript{54}

Sara Ruddick believes that women come to the belief of non-violence as "maternal thinkers" concerned with the care of the earth and its inhabitants because of the ability to organise around interconnectedness with others and that, for women, the moral imperative that emerges is an injunction to care, a responsibility to discern and alleviate the "real" and recognizable trouble of this world.\textsuperscript{55}

Women around the world are not innocent victims, but active members of non-violent movements to end injustice in occupied lands. Tibetans build their non-violent resistance on a base of prayers, cultural activities, and rituals that reflect a deep sense of the spiritual. By staging demonstrations, using printed materials,


forming pro-independence groups, passing information to exiles or foreigners, criticising the government in public or private, and carrying the Tibetan flag and pictures of the Dalai Lama, Tibetan women have developed non-violent action and ritual. They present a major force in history through the power of non-violent actions combined with their deep spirituality that infuses every moment of their lives.

The role of the nuns was remarkable during the protest movements. Despite the worst treatment reserved for them, out of 105 demonstrations in Lhasa between September 1987 and May 1992, nuns led forty protests.

Until the 17 April 1989 demonstration by Garu nuns, after the shooting on 10 December 1988, there was no demonstration after the nuns took to the streets on 22 February 1989. Nuns have been victims of the cruellest and degrading forms of punishment under the Chinese regime. After being arrested and subsequently interrogated brutally, they refused to capitulate, frustrating the efforts of their interrogators to get useful information and confessions. They had consciously decided to sacrifice themselves regardless of the consequences. It is well known that on 17 April 1989, Garu nuns signalled the first signs of a renewed cycle of protest after the wave of arrest in the wake of Monlam festival. On 25 April nuns from Chupsang nunnery held a demonstration around the Barkhor. However, they were arrested and interrogated. The aim of the interrogation was to intimidate the prisoners, extract confessions, gain information about other participants in the demonstrations, and accomplish "through reform" by convincing prisoners of the

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futility of the goals of Tibetan independence. Prisoners were made to witness scenes of brutality in prison in order to persuade them to confess. After Monlam festival, twenty fives monks and three nuns were held, including fourteen monks from Ganden on the ground of initiating Monlam ‘riot’ (5 March) and some monks were held for writing letters and painting posters to organise a boycott of Monlam. Five monks from Drepung were arrested on the basis of supporting a boycott of Monlam. The two Garu nuns were continually held for preparing small pieces of paper with Free Tibet slogans on them and throwing to the air during the demonstration.

After the period of unrest and riots, the Chinese enforced strong police control. But after the each ‘relative phase,’ which usually lasts for few months, nuns have again renewed political unrest and demonstrations. According to Hanna Havnevik, about fifty percent of nuns have been arrested in demonstrations since 1987, imprisoned without trial and subjected to severe torture. Thus deprived of their vocation, some of them have chosen to escape to India where the Dalai Lama and thousands of Tibetans live in exile. Since January 1991 over two hundred nuns have crossed the border into Nepal and northern India to join the forces with around 110,000 Tibetan refugees, struggling to free their country from Chinese rule.

In conclusion, it can be rightly said that the Sangha with its large membership of monks and nuns has led the pro-independence movement. In the process, women got a chance to show their mettle and they did it with success.

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58 Ibid. p. 103.
60 Ibid. p. 86.